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Putin Says Russia 'Reserves Right' to Oust More U.S. Diplomats

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Kremlin Press Service

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday hinted Russia could impose additional U.S. diplomatic staff cuts after the closure of its San Francisco consulate.

"If we talk about full parity, then it is not 455 U.S. diplomats in Moscow, but [455] minus 155," he told reporters at the closing of the BRICS summit in China.

The statement comes after Moscow imposed a Sept. 1 deadline for the U.S. diplomatic mission to cut its staff to 455.

Russia's Foreign Ministry issued the "suggestion" to bring the number of U.S. diplomatic staff to the same level as Russian diplomats in the U.S., after Congress overwhelmingly passed a bill tightening sanctions on Russia over allegations of election interference.

Putin, however, on Tuesday said the agreed number of Russian and U.S. diplomatic staff "includes 155 people working for the United Nations."

“So we reserve the right to decide on the number of American diplomats in Moscow,” he said at the Xiamen conference.

The White House has said President Donald Trump personally ordered the closure of the San Francisco consulate and annexes in Washington D.C. and New York late last week.

The move caused an uproar in Moscow, with Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova claiming FBI officers had searched the San Francisco consulate. Russia had also been told by the U.S. State Department that it would be forced to sell the building, she said.

“The fact that the Americans reduced the number of our diplomatic institutions is their right,” Putin told reporters. “A different matter is that it was clearly done in such a boorish manner. That doesn’t speak well of our American partners.”

Putin called the confiscation of the consulate building in San Francisco “unprecedented” and “a violation of Russia's property rights.”

He said he would instruct Russia’s Foreign Ministry to take the matter to court. “Let’s see how effective the widely praised American judicial system is,” Putin said.

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